Being winter wise

Helping you to look after yourself during the coldest months
Winter can be a difficult time of the year for many of us. Dark evenings and icy pavements can make it hard to get out, while cold weather can make us vulnerable to illness.

And it’s not just severe weather that can make us unwell – even average winter temperatures can affect our health. Thankfully, by being prepared and following the suggestions in this guide, you can stay as healthy and safe as possible this winter.

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Looking after yourself

Wrap up warm
Layer your clothes to stay warm – the layers will trap warm air between them. Wear a hat and gloves when you go outside and wrap a scarf around your face to warm the air you breathe in.

Take care when going outside in icy weather
If you absolutely have to go out when it’s icy, wear shoes with good grip and a warm lining, and put on thick socks. Keep grit and/or salt to
put on your path. Some councils provide free bags of this or you can buy it from a DIY store.

Eat well

Have hot drinks and hot meals regularly throughout the day. Food is a vital source of energy which helps keep you warm. Have plenty of fruit and vegetables to boost your immune system and give you more energy.

Drink more milk

The NHS recommends drinking more milk and having more dairy products in winter to boost your immune system and help prevent colds. They contain protein and vitamins A and B12 as well as calcium to keep your bones strong.
Keep your cupboards and freezer well stocked

Keep basic food items for times when it’s too cold to go out. Think about stocking up on tinned soup, baked beans, long-life milk and fruit juice, ready-made sauces, pasta and rice. Keep frozen vegetables, meat, fish and bread in your freezer.

Stay active

Get outside if it isn’t icy or too cold – it can boost your mood to get outdoors while it’s still daylight. If you’re indoors, don’t sit still for more than an hour. Moving around your home can help to keep you warm.
Staying healthy

Get your flu jab

Have a flu jab every year. It’s free if you’re 65 or over, a carer or have certain health conditions. Flu is more than just a bad cold and can increase your risk of more serious illnesses such as pneumonia. Make an appointment with your GP or see if your local pharmacy offers the flu jab.

Check you’ve had a pneumo jab

The pneumo (or pneumococcal) jab is a one-off jab that helps protect against pneumonia, meningitis and septicaemia. You’re eligible for one if you’re 65 or over.

Restock your medicine cabinet

Keep a range of everyday medicines at home in case you get ill, such as paracetamol, ibuprofen, cough medicine, lozenges and sore throat sprays.

Ask your pharmacist for advice if you’re unwell. Some pharmacies operate a minor ailment scheme, which may enable you to get medicine for some minor illnesses. These are free of charge if you don’t normally pay for prescriptions.
Ask your pharmacy if they offer a home delivery service for your repeat prescriptions too. This can be especially helpful in cold weather.

Get enough vitamin D

Lack of sunshine in winter can mean you don’t get enough vitamin D, which can make you feel tired. The main source of vitamin D is sunlight but you can also get it from oily fish (such as salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines), eggs, red meat, margarine, and some cereals and dairy products.

The Department of Health recommends that all adults take a daily vitamin D supplement from October to March. People at higher risk of vitamin D deficiency may be advised to take a supplement all year round. Speak to your GP or pharmacist for advice.
Keeping your home warm

Check the thermostat

Being cold isn’t just uncomfortable – it can also be very bad for your health. Low temperatures increase the risk of flu as well as a heart attack, stroke or hypothermia. Your living room should be around 70°F (21°C) and your other rooms should be at least 64°F (18°C).

Keep warm at night

A hot water bottle or electric blanket (but never both together) can warm up your bed. Check whether you can keep your blanket on all night or should switch it off before you get in. Get your
blanket checked every three years by an expert. Ask about this at the shop where you bought it or contact your local council’s trading standards department – they may even run free testing days.

Keep your bedroom window closed at night when it’s cold – low temperatures can raise your blood pressure and put you at risk of a stroke or heart attack.

**Use simple tips to keep your home warm**

Draw your curtains before it gets dark to keep the heat in (and consider getting thermal or heavy ones to keep your room warmer). Don’t block your radiators with furniture – keep them clear so heat can circulate. Put draught excluders round doors and windows. Contact the Energy Saving Advice Service for more tips (0300 123 1234, energysavingtrust.org.uk).

**Get your home insulated**

Insulating your loft and cavity walls and fitting a jacket to your hot water cylinder can make your home much warmer and save money on your bills. Read our free factsheet *Paying for maintenance and repairs in your*
home (0800 319 6789, independentage.org) to find out more about home insulation and how to pay for it.

Apply for a grant to make your home warmer

There are grants available to make your home more energy efficient, which will make it feel warmer and reduce your fuel bills too. You could be eligible for the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme if you get certain benefits – including Pension Credit – and own or privately rent your home. You may get help with insulating your home, replacing your boiler or upgrading your heating. Contact the Energy Saving Advice Service to find out if you’re eligible (0300 123 1234, energysavingtrust.org.uk).
Making winter more affordable

Claim the money you’re entitled to

Most people born before 6 May 1953 will get a Winter Fuel Payment of between £100 and £300 in November or December 2016. Call the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on 0345 915 1515 for more information.

If you get Pension Credit, you should automatically get a Cold Weather Payment of £25 when the temperature in your area is at 0°C (32°F) or below for seven days in a row between 1 November and 31 March.

You may qualify for a £140 discount on your electricity bill if you receive Guarantee Pension Credit or you’re on a low income, even if you use a pre-pay meter. Contact your energy supplier or the Warm Home Discount Scheme to find out more (0345 603 9439, gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme/what-youll-get).
Check you’re on the best fuel tariff

Switching supplier can be the best way to save money and may be easier than you think. Ofgem, the energy regulator, has created a website (goenergyshopping.co.uk) that can help you find out if you could save money by switching. If you’re not online, call one of the energy switching companies for advice. Age UK (0800 169 6565) has a free factsheet, Switching energy supplier, with a list of their telephone numbers.

Get help if you’re in debt

If you’re struggling to pay your energy bills, contact your supplier to set up a repayment plan. Charis Grants can direct you to sources of financial help with fuel bills (01733 421 021,
charisgrants.com). Remember that if you live in a home where everyone is of pensionable age, you can’t be cut off by your energy supplier between October and March.
Our free advice guides

Our practical, jargon-free advice guides give you the information you need to get the most out of older age.

**Advice for later life**
– support and entitlements for over-65s

**Extra help at home**
– essential advice for over-65s to live independently

**Choosing a care home**
– support and advice to get the best from your move

**Moneywise**
– how to boost your income and save money

**Staying in control when you're older**
– how to avoid being mistreated and what to do if it happens

**Dealing with depression**
– how to recognise the signs and the action you can take

**How to find the right care home**
– where to start and what to consider

To order your free advice guides, call 0800 319 6789 or visit independentage.org
About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That’s why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago, we’re independent so you can be.

For more information, visit our website [www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)

Speak to one of our advisers for free and confidential advice and information. Lines are open 8am-8pm, Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday. Freephone 0800 319 6789 or email advice@independentage.org